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10-2020

## MAKING PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN GHANA BETTER: A LOOK AT FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

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Frimpong, Kwarteng and Adjei, Kwabena, "MAKING PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN GHANA BETTER: A LOOK AT FUNDING AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4406.  
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**MAKING PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN GHANA BETTER: A LOOK AT FUNDING AND  
GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is predicated on the thought that effective governance structures and reliable funding options are sine qua non to providing improved library and information services. It provides laconic profile of library and information services landscape of a local government area, and identifies chronic lack of funding and weak governance structures as two major snags to providing efficient library and information services in the local government area. Declining global funding for library and information services is reviewed, whilst best practices for financing and governing public libraries are examined. The authors conclude by suggesting a municipal library governance structure and dedicated funding model as catalysts for providing sustainable library and information services in the local government area of Ghana.

**Keywords:** Funding, Governance, Library, Information Services, Local Government, Ghana.

## **Introduction**

A major argument for decentralisation and local governance has mostly been to encourage grassroots participation in local governance and development process. Implementation of this policy in Ghana is nonetheless confronted with difficulties. Notable among them are institutional weaknesses and inadequate funding. Two possible interpretations are often adduced to explain in particular, the perennial lack of funds bedevilling local governments in Ghana. First is dribbling revenues available to local governments, and second, the increasing and competing demands for social amenities due in part to natural population increases and rural-urban migration. The results of these are that many local government areas in Ghana are saddled with acute infrastructural deficits and poor municipal service delivery. Most challenging is the maintenance of public facilities. Particularly, if local government services are provided freely on account of social justice, or when uneconomic user fees are charged.

One area that has suffered from grave underfunding and other institutional challenges at local government jurisdictions in Ghana is the library and information services sector. Library services have traditionally been free. In view of this, providers of library services require reliable sources of income in order to keep libraries open at all times. Gills et al., (2001) have therefore remarked that any investments in library infrastructures, collections and computer systems would not be meaningful, unless dedicated sources of funding are made available to replace worn out and outdated books, and upgrading of computer systems. The need for reliable sources of income for libraries is further expressed by Krolak (2005), who informs us that adequate funding is needed for the building, for acquiring relevant materials, library furniture, for continuing education, for

computers with internet access and for running costs. The grim reality however is that many libraries worldwide are under-funded, Krolak (2005) concludes.

Local governments do not have the wherewithal to provide all the infrastructure and municipal services residents require at all times. The problem of funding is therefore not exclusive to local governments in Ghana alone. The situation however looks interminable. This is because vibrant economic and commercial activities in many local government areas in the country are few, unemployment high and incomes low. Additionally, most local governments in the country, have weak capacities to mobilise revenue locally.

The world is no doubt becoming a knowledge society and libraries will continue to play important role in the pursuit for knowledge. It is for this reason that society needs not leave the provision of library and information services to be determined by the public choice theory. This paper thus aims at finding remedial measures to the perennial problems of underfunding and debilitating governance structures that affect the provision of library and information services in the Asante Akyem local government area.

### **State of Libraries in Asante Akyem Local Government Area**

Public access to library and information service in the Asante Akyem local government area is limited. In a study that examined access to library and information services in this area, Frimpong (2015) paints an awful picture of the state of libraries. He reports of an indescribable deficit in the provision of library and information services and concludes that only a minuscule proportion of residents had minimal access to a few but poorly resourced libraries. He identified the absence of functional governance structures, lack of a dedicated source of funding for libraries, and an

apparent lack of recognition of the relevance of libraries by the municipal authorities and residents alike, as some of the setbacks in providing efficient library and information services in the local government area. The result of these hindrances according to him, is a deteriorated library and information service sector characterised by limited access to school, community and public libraries. He states further that the few libraries in the local government area existed only in name rather than function, and concludes that even the few libraries faced extinction due to deteriorating collections, staff shortages, funding difficulties and waning patronage.

### **Declining Funding for Libraries: A Global Overview**

Reliable funding is the lifeblood of all libraries that provide unremitting and satisfactory library and information services. The California Association of Library Trustees and Commissioners (CALTAC, 1998) could not have better articulated this standpoint, when it reminded library trustees of the link between funding and survival of public libraries. But most importantly, the utmost responsibility of the library trustees to look for funding for libraries. Apart from the strikingly reminder portraying the vital role funding plays in public libraries, it subtly affirms the familiar assertion that public libraries may flounder without regular funding. To the extent that the declaration was purposely directed at library trustees and commissioners as those with the onerous task to look for funding for public libraries, it is noteworthy that the task of seeking funding for public libraries, in reality, is not limited to library trustees and commissioners only. Regardless of whose duty is it to ensure that libraries are well resourced and opened at all times, what is certain now is that funding for public and other libraries is experiencing a global downturn.

Inadequate funding for public libraries in Africa especially is not new, but measures to sustainably address this pecuniary gap are yet to be instituted. Poor funding according to Opara (2008) has

been the bane of public libraries in Nigeria, any other problem emanates from this. The situation according to him is aggravated by infrequent releases of government subventions, and cites the example of the Library Board in Imo State of Nigeria who for a period of fourteen years received no book funds from its provincial government. He concludes that the paucity of library funding culminated in improper maintenance of branch libraries. Ifidon (1990a) similarly reports of how a slump in oil revenue and inflation resulted in cutbacks of library budgets in Nigeria. Ifidon (1990a) thus posited that unless access to reading materials is improved, the quality of university graduates in Nigeria was likely to be affected. Funding and financial allocations to public libraries in Nigeria have thus remained poor for decades since inception (before and during recession) and become an intractable phenomenon (Eteng, 2018).

Opara (2008, p. 351) further highlights the problem of funding for libraries in Africa as a “lack of ideological inclination on the part of African leaders towards supporting the public library”. The apparent lack of enthusiasm of the public to own libraries in their communities according to Opara also accounts for the poor state of public libraries in Africa. The republic of South Africa is no exception to the library funding quagmire. Leach (n.d) for instance reports of how decline in funding for libraries has put public libraries in South Africa under financial distress. An outcome of a survey of heads of nine Provincial Library Services (PLSs) and ten Independent Public Libraries (IPLs) in South Africa affirmed Leach’s observation. The study revealed among others that except one provincial library who’s funding was stable, all others were experiencing a decline in funding (Leach, 1998).

Like Nigeria, these cuts in library funding Leach noted, inexorably affected acquisitions and lack of expansion of library services in South Africa. An impact assessment commissioned by the

Department of Arts and Culture (2007) and carried out by KPMG validated the findings of Leach (1998), and indicates that public libraries in South Africa were not adequately funded. In particular, the investigations established that not all provinces in South Africa actively budgeted for public library services. The South African government responded to this by introducing a new conditional grant called “Community Library Services Grant” in its budget for the 2007 financial year. Similar narrative is reported in Malawi and Bolivia. According to Book Aid International (2004) in Krolak (2005), Malawi's National Library Service received no funding to buy books for the more than 1,000 library centers that it services in year 2003. Public and school libraries in Bolivia also received no funding from their government to buy books (Krolak, 2005). While inadequate funding constraints university libraries in Ghana to acquire library materials and information services at levels pertained in the late 1950s (Badu and Loughridge, 1997), unclear budgetary policies have been identified as a common weakness of university libraries in Africa (University of Nairobi 2012, cited in Mapulanga, 2013). In his paper on collection development in African universities, Ifidon (1990) also highlighted funding and the effects of heavy reliance on government for financial support as the most serious problem. Issak (2000:12) in a review of public libraries in Africa echoed the declining government support to public libraries and comments that in majority of the cases examined, “the government would only guarantee the payment of salaries, not the funding of other activities within the sector”.

The declining funding for public libraries may not be entirely an African phenomenon. For example, the American Library Association (2009) stated that most public and local libraries were experiencing funding challenges at the time public demand for library services had increased. The Association projected further reductions in funding to libraries in the 2011 financial year, although more libraries experienced a decline in funding in the 2009 and 2010 fiscal years. One of the



reasons for the reducing library funding according to Jaeger et al., (2013) is because library activities and contributions cannot easily be translated into monetary terms, hence it makes them easy targets for budget cuts, and according to Eteng (2018) layoffs, foreclosures and job freezes during economic recession. Bourke (2007, p.135) provides additional evidence of the declining library funding in the USA: “public libraries in the USA are facing budget cut of between 5% - 15%”. Several writers and institutions including the following have equally commented on the library funding challenges: Allen, 2003; American Libraries 2009a; American Libraries 2009b; Bundy, 2008; Bundy, 2009; Burlingame, 1994; Coffman, 2004; Hennen Jr., 2004; Losinski, 2011; Rogers, 2002; Rushton, 2007; US Newswire, 2009; White, 1999; Dempsey, 1998; Oder, 1999; Line, 1997; Salman et al. 2014; Cleaver, 2015; Kelley, 2015; Warburton, 2013; Francis, 2020; Guion, 2017; Lison et al., 2016 and Agosto, 2008.

So critical has the library funding become that city officials in year 2005 threatened to close down libraries at Salinas (California) and Bedford (Texas) when taxpayers turned down tax proposals to keep libraries open (Coffman, 2006). The examples of the two cities according to Coffman are “just the tip of the iceberg – of a much larger, much more widespread, and seemingly intractable library funding crisis”. Coffman (2006 p.26) expatiated the declining funding for libraries in the following:

“finally, as if to add insult to injury, the tiny percentages of the municipal budget local governments have agreed to share with libraries has been declining steadily for at least the past 50 years. According to the Public Library Survey in 1950, libraries received a paltry two percent of the total municipal budget on average – a figure the survey called grossly inadequate to achieve the mission of the public library. Sadly, things have only gotten

worse; by 2005, libraries were receiving less than 0.5 percent, a decline of over 75 percent over the past 50 years”.

Coffman thus describes the library funding challenge as a fundamental structural problem that has persisted for a long time. No matter the financial encumbrances however, society must endeavour to keep public libraries opened, because of the important role they play. And as Webster (1999) postulates, libraries are not set to disappear either in the short, medium or even the longer term.

The progressive decline in funding for public libraries has repercussions on library services. Webster (1995:112) enunciates the effects of a declining funding on UK public libraries in the following: “services have been curtailed, newspaper subscriptions have been cancelled, periodicals have been rigorously reduced, opening hours have shrunk and there are fewer volumes on the shelves especially up-to-date books”. Similar expectation is expressed by Jaeger et al., (2013). The authors note: reduced funding implies fewer hours, fewer resources, fewer services, and fewer staff members able to provide assistance and education in the library. Diminished hours, resources, services, and education mean that libraries will not be able to provide the level of service to the public that they both need and have come to expect. The institutes of Museums and Library Services’s 2012 report (cited in Guion 2017) notes a correlation between library spending and usage, stating that when spending goes up, so does library usage.

Budget cuts and unpredictability financing to university libraries according to Ifidon (1990b) affects any meaningful planning, and leaves little or nothing for collection development after paying staff salaries and wages. These cutbacks Ifidon continues adversely affected university library services, most especially, at the time university admissions in the Nigeria were increasing.

The budget cuts further compelled librarians to place more books on reserve and on short-term loans. Consequently, students resorted to excessive photocopying, while lecturers engaged in the sale of hand outs that encouraged rote learning. So serious has library funding become that only widespread protests by the public, including a hunger strike of employees, could prevent the closure of several libraries in 1999 (Döllgast, 2001, cited in Krolak, 2005). The declining funding for libraries if not resolved will eventually collapse the entire library and information services sub-sector in developing countries. What cannot elude everyone is that fulfilment or otherwise of library's objectives is influenced by the level of financial support the library receives (Ifidon, 1990b).

Aguolu (1989) cited in Opara (2008 p. 351) nonetheless seems to have the magic wand to unlock the funding challenge bedevilling public libraries suggesting that “for the library to flourish in any society, the economy must be sufficiently bright to motivate the government to commit funds to library development”. OPINIA (2008) cited in (Gould and Gomez, 2010) share similar view stating that the inadequate political will for public libraries in Moldova, is dictated by the poor socio-economic situation of the country. Reinforcing this view is the common argument that when people are starving in developing countries, information needs cannot be prioritized (Gould and Gomez, 2010), and supported by the fact that vagaries in export revenues will affect funding including budgetary allocation to libraries (Ifidon, 1990b). I reckon a sufficiently bright economy to be economic growth. However, it is unclear and indeterminate when this sufficiently bright economy will be achieved. It could be now, sooner or never. But must a nation necessarily have to wait for a sufficiently bright economy before committing funds to develop its library and information services sector? What about the developed and comparatively richer economies which are also

experiencing cuts in library funding? Contrary to this supposition, a nation may perhaps first need educated and knowledgeable citizenry who had access to better resourced libraries to leverage a sufficiently bright economy. I will therefore cautiously endorse the logic of waiting to experience sufficiently bright economy before libraries can flourish. This is because, there is no guarantee that when a sufficiently bright economy is achieved, the library sector will automatically benefit from higher budgetary allocations particularly in developing countries. On the contrary, deeper introspection of existing library financing mechanisms is needed, unexplored areas explored, and resource mobilisation from existing sources intensified. This is because public libraries are venues that provide affordable and meaningful access to information (Gould and Gomez, 2010), and as Sager (1989) in Opara (2008) points out, a public library can go only as far as its budget allows.

### **Financing Public Libraries**

There are various public libraries financing models. Local governments have however been the traditional providers and financiers of public libraries. Article 41 of the Law on Local Self-Government (1996) of the Republic of Armenia for instance, mandates local authorities (Community Council) to provide libraries. In Nigeria, the onus lies on State and local government councils to provide public libraries (Opara, 2008). In spite of this Opara admits that only a few of the councils provide library services to complement what the States provide. This according to him is due mainly to the absence of legislations by the State Houses of Assembly that enjoin local governments to provide library services. The Hungarian Library Act (1997 CXL Act) states that the provision of local and county library services is a compulsory task of the local authorities (Toth, 2009). In a report by KPMG and commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture (2007), public libraries in South Africa were primarily financed by local governments with

additional funding from the provincial governments, although provincial governments now have the responsibility to provide public libraries. The situation is no different in the State of California in the United States. According to CALTAC (1998 p. 18), “every public library in California depends upon a local government jurisdiction - a city, county, or special district for its basic budget”. Also eleven counties in West Virginia have special laws to fund public libraries (Neto and Hall, 2017). The aforementioned affirm the long held tradition of local governments providing funding for public libraries.

Local governments obtain their funding for public libraries from primary and secondary sources. Property and ad valorem taxes are the main primary sources for financing public libraries. These taxes are commonly levied at local, regional or central governments (Gill et al., 2001). According to CALTAC (1998), local ad valorem real property tax or a dedicated-purpose tax for libraries had been the main traditional sources of financing public libraries in California. The preference for a dedicated-purpose source of financing public libraries is to ensure a predictable and sustainable funding. Nichols (2010) concurs with this assertion and states that because public library is a public service, a reliable public funding is the most appropriate way to pay for it.

In addition to property and ad valorem taxes, some other cities and counties supplement public library funding through special local taxes such as sales tax, timber yield tax and transit logging tax (CALTAC, 1998). Local tax has therefore become a quintessential and popular source among the primary sources for financing public libraries. Present day public libraries acquire the bulk of their library funding from local property taxes (Bremer, n.d), thereby making public libraries tax supported public goods (Hennen Jr. 2004; Allen, 2003). Bourke (2007) provides evidence of this

in Australia where a minimum of 75 percent of annual public funding for libraries is provided by local governments with the rest coming from state governments, although, in New South Wales (NSW), funding from state government is averaging less than seven percent.

Although the bulk of funding for public libraries is provided by local governments, this source is nonetheless complemented by subventions from State/provincial and federal governments. The California Library Services Act (CLSA) of 1977 and Public Library Finance Act (PLF) exemplify two legislations enacted in 1982 for financing public libraries in the California State. The Public Library Finance Act is specifically to assure an adequate level of public library service . . . [and] provide stable financing through a combination of State and local revenues. Federal funding support for public libraries in the USA is also made available through a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) of 1996, originally called the Library Services Act of 1956.

In addition to this block grants exist at the federal government level which local governments can access after fulfilling stated eligibility criteria. Ultimately, all these pieces of legislations are designed to ensure reliable source of funding for library and information services. There is no ambiguity from the foregoing that the State of California greatly relies on revenues from three sources - federal, state and local governments to finance its public libraries. Less than 10 percent of library funding however, comes from the state or federal sources (CALTAC, 1998), implying that the bulk of funding for public libraries in California comes from local governments. This presents local governments with the task of seeking the right balance of funding from national, state, local and private sources. But as Burlingame (1994) admits, this has been the major challenge for most libraries.

The secondary sources from which local governments finance public libraries are also referred to as alternative, non-tax or non-traditional. They are named alternative because they are obtained from sources other than taxation (Leach, n.d). Gill et al., (2001) list the main secondary sources of financing public libraries as donations, fees and fines, service charges (photocopying, printing etc), sponsorships and lottery funds. Gill et al., (2001) further catalogue other secondary sources for financing public libraries as incomes from bequests, book sales, rental of building spaces, coffee shops, and fees for online database searches.

Significant amount of incomes from secondary sources are also obtained from identifiable groups and private organisations such as non-governmental organisations and foundations. CALTAC (1998 p. 21) reinforces this and acknowledges that “while adequate library funding is the legitimate and primary responsibility of government, most California libraries have sought and used some forms of non-government grants and gifts for library enrichment”. Hood (1996) also mentions public tax monies, private funds or both as income streams for financing public libraries in the USA and throughout North America. A breakdown of private contributions to library funding in the USA in year 1993 according to Hood stood at: 87%, 7.3% and 4.7% for individuals, private foundations and corporations respectively. These statistics indicate that the bulk of private contributions to public library funding in the USA during the period was realised from individuals. The situation could be entirely different in a developing country like Ghana where poverty is high, wealthy people are few, and the culture of donating to the course of public libraries is yet to catch up with the populace, particularly, the affluent.

Moreover Bremer (n.d) references data by the National Centre for Education Statistics - NCES (1997) of the USA, which shows that 77.6%, 12.1% and 0.9% of public library funding came from local, state and federal governments respectively. The remainder came from other [alternative] sources. This data confirm the significant contributions local governments make to the overall basket of public library funding. Local governments thus need to focus on local sources, particularly, local taxes as a means of financing public libraries. Although alternative sources of financing libraries contribute relatively less to the overall public library budget, funding from this source is indispensable, since it reduces the risks of depending on single source. In support of this, Coffman (2004 p.37) argues that “with no alternative source of funds, when the economy heads south and tax coffers shrink, we have no option except to cut hours, close branches and lay off staff”.

Coffman continues that even in the best of times, depending heavily on a single source of revenue puts libraries in a precarious position – especially when that source of revenue is local taxes (Coffman, 2006). Ifidon (1990) and Jaeger, et al (2013) reinforce the consequences of relying heavily on government grants and local property tax for large portion of their funding, cautioning this could be disastrous especially in times of economic depressions. Moreover, local taxes in the opinion of Coffman (2006) face competition for services like security, education and health, and the demand for these services will always trump. So although reasonable amount of monies can potentially be raised from secondary sources to support a library’s budget, Nichols (2016 p. 53) maintains that “they should always be considered supplemental to tax support”. This is because, “to rely on donations for critical operational expenses such as salaries, building maintenance and utilities are inviting a crisis for the library”. In view of this CALTAC (1998 p. 18) recommends a



“good use of a combination of all funds should bring the broadest and most accessible service to the users of the individual, local library”. This notwithstanding, the proportion of funding that each source contributes to the overall library budget will depend on the prevailing local conditions in each country (Gill et al., 2001).

Also important to note is that substantial amount of public library funding that come from alternative sources in the developed nations have come from philanthropic organisations established by private individuals like Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford and many others. Such foundations are uncommon in many developing countries. Are wealthy people fewer in developing economies like Ghana? Or are the few rich people not wealthy enough to set up foundations to support libraries like their counterparts in the developed countries? On the contrary, Opara (2008) holds the view that Nigeria has wealthy citizens capable of supporting library development. It is therefore baffling why wealthy people in developing countries particularly Africa do not bankroll library development. So low has funding for public libraries in Ghana become that no improvements in library and information services are to be expected anytime soon, until funding for public libraries are increased. This brings into the discourse how public libraries in Ghana are financed.

Funding for public libraries in Ghana are spelt out in Act 327 of 1970 of the Ghana Library Board (now Ghana Library Authority). Section 10 of the Act broadly defines the sources of funding as follows: moneys from government or local governments either by way of grant-in-aid or endowment or otherwise, charges, dues, interests on investments, donations and any other moneys to the Board's in the course of operations.

Unlike other jurisdictions that have special legislations to make additional funding to public libraries, as in the case of the California Library Services Act (CLSA) and Public Library Finance Act (PLF) in the USA, no such arrangements exist at the central, regional or local government levels in Ghana. The result of which is underfunding of the few public libraries across the country. Agyen-Gyasi and Atta-Obeng (2010) vividly described library funding situation in their study of the Ashanti Regional Library. The authors report that the library received monthly imprest of \$20 equivalent for all its administrative and operational expenses, and a further \$16.67 per month for fuelling office vehicles. Engman et al, (2016) also found that the Ghana Library Board (Authority) suspended its in-service training programme since year 2000 due partly to inadequate funding. The foregoing endeavoured providing insight into public library funding mix. We now consider how public libraries are governed.

### **Governing Public Libraries**

As previously noted, public libraries are traditionally provided by local governments, albeit, in some countries, it is a shared responsibility between local, federal and central governments. Public libraries are governed by library boards or supervisory committees comprising of locally elected representatives and appointed members to the council (Gill et al., 2001). The chief/principal librarian of the local government area is usually the secretary to the library board/committee. However, in situations where library services are provided and funded by entities and philanthropists other than local governments, such libraries are usually regulated and operated within legislative provisions that set the boundaries for governments' involvement (Gill et al., 2001). Any kind of library, whether national, university, school, public, private or special library therefore has a form of advisory board or supervisory committee whose functions are guided and

regulated by elaborate terms of reference or statutes (Haraszti, 1999). According to Gould and Gomez (2010), when communities are involved and locals are on the board of directors, they care about the libraries, which cater to local needs, and are invested in their sustainability. Typical is Kitengesa Community Library which is managed by a small board of directors that includes community members and a school headmaster (Dent, 2006).

Along the same line, some parliamentary libraries do have standing library committees. These library boards/committees according to Haraszti (1999) perform oversight functions, provide strategic direction and advice by authorising library expenditures, raising funds and reporting to the general assembly. So where there are functional boards/committees in place, librarians only manage and control but do not govern (Stockham, 1975) cited in Haraszti (1999). It is clear from the foregoing review that local governments provide funding for public libraries and govern them as well.

In Ghana, the Ghana Library Board (now Ghana Library Authority) is the body vested with power to develop, manage and maintain public libraries. Section 3(a) and (b) of the Library Board Act (Act 327) state the core duties of the Board as follows: to “establish, equip, manage and maintain public libraries in Ghana” and “to take all such steps as may be necessary to discharge such functions”. The Board is headed by a Director of Library Services who is represented and assisted by Regional Advisory Committees in the regions. Sections 9 (a) (b) (c) of the Act (Act 327) read together, require the Regional Advisory Committees to advise the Board on matters relating to the development and usage of library services in the regions and to perform any other duties assigned

to them by the Board. Section 14 (1) (2) of the Act further enjoins the Board to make rules to regulate all libraries that fall under its authority.

The now Ghana Library Authority has 10 regional as well as 53 district and branch libraries. Each Regional Library also operates a mobile library services, which visits smaller municipalities (Plockey, 2014). Some communities also have community libraries procured either through self-initiatives, sponsorship by NGOs, district assemblies or both (Plockey, 2014). Konongo-Odumase branch library in the Asante Akyem Central Municipality is one such branch libraries. This branch library is without a governing board or supervisory committee of the municipal assembly. As a result, the library is not governed by the municipal assembly although the Ghana Library Authority a decentralised department under the existing local government framework. Staff of the branch library thus report to the headquarters of the Ghana Library Authority through their regional head. The lack of a municipal library board or supervisory committee to give strategic directions, has in part, contributed to the underdeveloped state of library and information services in the entire local government area.

### **The Way Forward**

Many strategies are needed to make libraries in the Asante Akyem local government area work well. Imperatives to achieving this are efficient governance framework, reliable sources of funding and awakened public consciousness about the relevance of libraries. A two tier governance structure seems auspicious in remedying the governance challenges impeding the provision of library and information services in the local government area. Implicit in the strengthening of oversight responsibilities for improved library services will be to provide: clear delineation of

hierarchical leadership responsibilities, define explicit lines of control and authority, and to lay bare, channels for collaborations and reporting within the local governance structure.

To begin with, a sub-committee of the municipal assembly to be known as Education and Library Services sub-committee is proposed. This proposed sub-committee will be analogous to a library board of a council/local government, but represents a thin modification in name of an existing “Education sub-committee” of the municipal assembly that is in charge of education matters. This will comprise of assembly and ex-officio members. Consequently, the remit of the existing Education sub-committee needs to be expanded to reflect the new name and role expectations. Subject to the approval of the municipal assembly, the duty of the proposed Education and Library Services sub-committee shall be to coordinate the overall development of library and information services in the municipal area. This may include but not limited to the following: policy formulation, planning, fund raising, marketing, promotion of library use etc. The municipal director of education or his/her representative and the municipal librarian/library assistant shall be ex-officio members of the proposed Education and Library Services sub-committee.

The second tier in the proposed library governance structure is “Community Library Management Committees” to be formed at and operate from all settlements in the municipal area that have public or community libraries. This is because involving local communities has been found to be key to the success of a library mission (Gould and Gomez, 2010). These committees will be made up of the assembly member of the electoral area where the library is located, head teachers in the settlement and opinion leaders. At the top of the hierarchy of the proposed library governance structure will be the municipal assembly which shall exercise approval powers of all decisions by

the sub-committees. The proposed Community Library Management Committees shall then report to the “Education and Library Services Sub-committee” of the assembly. The proposed committees shall be informed and involved in all private, individual and communal initiatives towards developing library and information services in the municipal area. The terminus ad quem of the proposed governance structure is to situate governance of library and information services in the municipality within an effective organisational framework that leverages improved library and information services provision.

In addition to a governance structure, reliable source of funding is also needed to make libraries in the municipal area provide sustainable quality services to the people. In as much as the quantum of funds potentially realisable from a source is an important consideration in the search for funding sources for public library development, predictability of revenue inflows is also key in exploring financing options. Considering economic outlook of the municipality, and also examining available models for funding public libraries, setting up a dedicated library fund emerges as viable choice in financing public libraries in the municipality. The proposed dedicated library fund needs to be a plural funding model incorporating both primary and secondary sources of revenue. It could be called a “Municipal Library Development Fund” (MLDF) and backed by a by-law.

## **Conclusion**

Many public libraries in Africa are unable to satisfy the reading and information needs of their citizens because of funding challenges (Alemna, 1995) cited in (Ngubeni, 2004). Consequently library services are not extensively used. According to Motsert (2001), whereas users of all library services in Botswana do not exceed five percent, only one to two percent of Tanzanian population

uses libraries. This is against the background that public library acts as a bridge between the information rich and the information poor (Kargbo, 2005 cited in Plockey, 2014), by providing free access to ICT particularly the internet (Krolak, 2005 cited in Plockey, 2014), function as places for people to gather for entertainment and socialization opportunities (Gould and Gomez, 2010), and a primary source of recreation and education to persons of all ages, any location, or any economic circumstance (California Library Services Act).

The low use of public libraries, is somewhat aggravated by a belief among a cross-section of the citizenry that public libraries were established in Africa probably to entrench elitism, acculturation and subjugation of African values. Proponents of these belief further argue that in fulfilment of this secreted agenda, public libraries were stocked with Eurocentric collections which had little relevance to African needs (Ngubeni, 2004). This mind-set according to this school of thought, had in some way influenced and diminished public interests in both investments and use of public libraries.

With passage of time however, this elitist ‘conspiracy theory’ and other similar perceived historical reasoning for establishing public libraries are waning, as libraries have become repositories for knowledge and information seeking. With groundswell in knowledge seeking and academic pursuits, the perceived covert intentions for setting up public libraries in the past, cannot override justification for not providing them in contemporary societies. This is because libraries nowadays enjoy overwhelming worldwide acceptance and appeal. It is for this reason that the past argument that suggest libraries were set up for the purposes of acculturation and elitism may no longer resonate with current trends and demands. There are several places in Ghana today that do not

have libraries but are somehow influenced by foreign cultures. Ghana as a developing country therefore has no choice but to provide and keep expanding its public library facilities (buildings and technologies) and promote their use as well.

That said, expanding library facilities and promoting their sustained use will certainly require huge financial outlay. This brings into the discussion issues around self-reliance as most public libraries in Africa are donor funded. Ngubeni (2004) has remarked that some public libraries still depend on donations for equipment such as computers and internet access and to some extent even books especially in rural areas. African countries cannot sustain the provision of quality library services by continuously relying on the benevolence of external funders. Evident of donor dependence is inappropriate collections found on the bookshelves of many public libraries in Africa. And as Mostert (2001) has commented, book donations often consist of discarded books from libraries, unsold books from publishers, or second-hand volumes. How long can public libraries in Africa continue to rely on discarded books often masqueraded as donations? Having reliable sources of funding for libraries is one of the surest way for public libraries in Africa to extricate themselves from the donor dependency.

In spite of the predicaments of public libraries in Ghana and those in the Asante Akyem municipal area in particular, there is brimming hope that increasing public access to quality public library and information services comparable to international standards is achievable in a developing country like Ghana if the district assemblies (local councils) take a lead role. But not until appropriate institutional structures and sustainable funding models are put in place. What remains



paramount is increased recognition of the importance of libraries among the public and political will.

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